

## Resisting the Standard: Rethinking Tunisia's Arab Identity within a Multilingual Context

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### Abstract

The present-day linguistic situation in the Arab world is marked by spatial diversity, evident in diglossia in each member-state. Diglossia, per Charles Ferguson (1959), is the coexistence of two linguistic varieties – belonging to the same language – within the same speech community. These varieties are hierarchically aligned, with the standard being the high variety (H) and the dialect being the low variety (L). Historically, Tunisia has always been multilingual; Berber, Punic, Latin, Arabic, Turkish, Spanish and French have all gained a foothold in the area (Lawson and Sachdev, 2000). Steadfastly since the Arab conquest of North Africa, Modern Standard Arabic has been the H variety used in formal writing. Tunisian Arabic (TA) is the quotidian L variety, used alongside French and English. The linguistic scene is far from stagnant and has, since Ferguson, witnessed the encroachment of TA on Standard domains; a phenomenon described as *leaky diglossia* (Fasold, 1984). This paper argues that multilingual education in Tunisia has further relegated MSA to a quasi-exclusively liturgical domain moving counter to the official discourse of uniformity that champions standardization, manifest particularly in the post-independence drive towards Arab(ic)ization. The empirical data provided by 65 respondents to a questionnaire shows the substitution of MSA by French (L2) and English (L3) in traditionally MSA domains. More significantly, over 40% of respondents strongly believe MSA to be a *different language*, rather than a *standard form* of their “dialect”. These findings correlate with a stronger sense of a Tunisian, or a Tunisian *first*, identity where Arabic and Arabness come after. The post-Arab(ic) Tunisian reality, while breaking from a language ideology grounded in a uniform Arab identity, itself centered around the Arabic language, harkens back to a Tunisian identity that is rooted in multiplicity and multilingualism.

**Keywords:** Diglossia, Standardisation, Modern Standard Arabic, Tunisian Arabic, Identity

## 1. Introduction

### 1.1. Preliminaries

The description of the linguistic situation of the Arab world relies a great deal on the foundational paper of Charles Ferguson (1959) “Diglossia”. It is, however, noteworthy to mention that he had not been the first researcher to comment on the linguistic duality within the Arab world. In fact, William Marçais (1930), in celebration of the centennial of the French occupation of Algeria, wrote on the phenomenon. Marçais (1930) particularly dubbed it “*a monster with two heads*”. Nearly a century after his evaluation, a reconsideration of the attitudes regarding diglossia, as well as the reality of diglossia itself, is due. In Fergusonian terms, “diglossia” is used to describe the sociolinguistic situation where two varieties of the same language co-exist with clearly demarcated “functions”. The varieties are H (High) which is the standard language of a given speech community, while the L variety (Low) is the dialect or the colloquial variety.

## **1.2. Problem Statement**

The present research situated itself within the Tunisian speech community, whereby the aforementioned varieties would correspond to Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) and Tunisian Arabic (TA) respectively. The work of Walters (2003) noted how the nature of diglossia has changed since the publication of Ferguson's work. More than twenty years after Walters' work, the present paper argues that the diglossic situation in Tunisia is the furthest from stagnant and rather evolving by virtue of a multilingual context that is not novel, but rather native to the geographical area.

## **1.3. Research Hypotheses and Questions**

The present paper hypothesized that the dichotomy between the H and L varieties has shifted since Ferguson's time with Modern Standard Arabic occupying a quasi-exclusive liturgical role. This is due to a post-Arab(ic) ideology that rendered the Tunisian speaker's identity Tunisian first, if not only, and then Arab. As such, the following research questions are raised:

- a) Has the domain of MSA use shrunk?
- b) Is the frequency of MSA usage correlated with a Tunisian sense of identity?
- c) How do Tunisians perceive their Tunisian identity within a larger Arab identity?

## **2. Review of Literature**

### **2.1. Definitional Concerns**

Prior to Ferguson's description of Diglossia, William Marçais (1930) provided an appraisal of the diglossic situation particularly from a pedagogical standpoint. Marçais likened the diglossic speech communities to a beast with two heads, a sort of monster that educational programs were unfit to accommodate. Although Marçais' appraisal was deemed colonialist by some, a significant portion of Arabic speakers, and researchers (Badawi, 1973), share his view.

The linguistic situation in the Arab world has interested several linguists (Blau, 1977; Ferguson, 1959; Versteegh, 1997; etc.). In 1959, Ferguson, in his article "Diglossia", introduced the term to describe the linguistic profile of the Arab world. Ferguson (1959) writes that

[Diglossia is] a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified... superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation (p. 336).

According to Ferguson (1959), the two varieties differ on nine aspects, the most relevant of which to this paper is function. In terms of function, the H and L varieties are said to be in complementary distribution, whereby one variety cannot substitute the other in a given context (e.g. the L variety is reserved for informal use, while the H variety is formal). This allocation of functions is not arbitrary. A point that Ferguson advances is that

An outsider who learns to speak fluent, accurate L and then uses it in a formal speech is an object of ridicule. A member of the speech community who uses H in a purely conversational situation or in an informal activity like shopping is equally an object of ridicule” (1959, p. 329).

Moreover, Ferguson insists that the H and L varieties are perceived by the community to be members of the *same* language. In fact, he writes that “[s]ometimes the feeling is so strong that H alone is regarded as real and L is reported ‘not to exist’” (Ferguson, 1959, pp. 329-330). In the same vein, Fishman notes that if speakers “tend to handle topic x in language X, this may well be because this topic pertains to a *domain* in which that language is ‘dominant’” (Fishman, 1965, p. 73). Later work, notably by Joshua Fishman’s (1967) and Gumperz (1961, 1964, 1993), on “diglossia” argued that the term can be extended to include not only varieties of one language but also two entirely unrelated languages in a complementary distribution in a given speech community.

Fishman (1967) argues that the very introduction of diglossia allows for the inclusion of languages rather than merely dialects. Fishman explains that diglossia may describe a situation where two or more languages are used within one society (1967). In this case, the distinguishing feature would be that each code serves “functions distinct from those considered appropriate for the other” (Fishman, 1967, p. 29).

As noted in the quote above, the defining factor for Fishman is not whether the two varieties belong to the same language or not, but rather the distribution of functions. This is in contrast to Ferguson’s definition, who insists that the H and L varieties are perceived by the community to be members of the same language.

In 1964, Gumperz wrote that “[w]hen several languages or dialects appear regularly as weapons of language choice, they form a behavioral whole, regardless of grammatical distinctness, and must be considered constituent varieties of the same verbal repertoire” (p. 140). In the same article, Gumperz argues that the type of interaction, transactional or personal, is responsible for the selection of one variety over the other. Transactional interactions which tend to be formal prompt the speakers to “suspend their individuality in order to act out the rights and obligations of relevant statuses”; on the other hand, in personal interactions, “participants act as individuals” in typically informal situations (1964, p. 149).

To exemplify his theorizing, Gumperz provided a description of the linguistic situation in Khalapur, north of Delhi, India, and in Hemnesberget, in Northern Norway. In the former situation, there exists two separate languages known by the members of the

community where each code is preserved for a particular situation and to a particular addressee. The division that Gumperz describes is not a simple H and L dichotomy (Hindi and Khalapur, respectively). In fact, the division in Khalapur exists along the lines of religion, caste, and socioeconomic power. These elements are key in defining the choice of variety and, most importantly, are not part of the features mentioned in Ferguson's description of diglossia. On the other hand, in Hemnesberget, the inhabitants use Bokmål "one of the two *officially recognized* [emphasis added] literary languages in Norway (Haugen 1959)" (Gumperz, 1964, p. 149). He adds that "Bokmål is *universally accepted* [emphasis added] throughout Northern Norway, while the other literary language, Nynorsk (formerly Landsmål), is more current in central and western coastal districts" (Gumperz, 1964, p. 149).

From the above-mentioned examples provided by Gumperz, it is fairly clear that Fishman's (1967) extension of diglossia to multilingual communities such as Khalapur and Hemnesberget cannot stand in the Arabic-speaking world. Indeed, a central element to Arabic diglossia is the perception of the members of the speech community that the L variety *does not exist* (Ferguson, 1959). Moreover, the L variety described by Ferguson is not distributed along the lines of caste or wealth; it does not have a literary heritage, nor is it recognized as a standard like Bokmål. Therefore, one cannot call the Khalapur or Hemnesberget communities diglossic, but rather bilingual.

In his paper "Linguistic and Social Interaction in Two Communities" (1964), Gumperz makes reference to Bernstein's observation on the role of social factors in regulating language choice. Bernstein writes that "[b]etween language in the sense defined and speech is social structure. The particular form a social relationship takes acts selectively on what is said" (1964, p. 56). In other words, the linguistic choices that speakers make on a daily basis are hardly neutral and are not independent of culture. In this respect, generalizing the framework of describing diglossia to include any speech community that allocates different functions to different codes would doubtlessly simplify the task. However, such an approach would also disregard peculiar social and cultural structures that cannot be divorced from the study of language. In studying diglossia, one cannot ignore the general perception that the two varieties are *one* language. For this reason, this paper opts for following the "classical" route of studying diglossia as first described by Charles Ferguson (1959).

## 2.2. The Tunisian Context

In her book *Arabic sociolinguistics: Topics in diglossia, gender, identity, and politics* (2020), Reem Bassiouney cites a passage from an Egyptian novel that aptly describes the diglossic situation in the Arab world:

When he speaks sincerely his words are in colloquial. A colloquial that was the only variety he knew and used in narration before. But once he starts speaking what they dictate to him, then he speaks in the language of books, and his words become comic! Muhra, Mustafa's ex-wife, in *Qismat al-ghuramā* ('The debtor's share') by Yūsuf al-Qa'īd (2004). (2020, p. 10)

Bassiouny comments that this fictional passage may reflect the reality in most Arab countries. She comments that Arabic speakers are perpetually torn between two languages with distinct roles. While they learn poetry in one, they sing in another (Bassiouny, 2020). This duality is present in all Arab countries and Tunisia is no exception. In Tunisia, the official language is Modern Standard Arabic (MSA, or *Al-arabiya*). Yet, Tunisians scarcely use MSA outside of formal contexts. On the other hand, Tunisian Arabic (TA) is the predominant variety used in most contexts. Despite the prevalence of TA, speakers still hold the H variety (MSA) in higher esteem, while the L variety (TA) is perceived as a “corrupted” version. This oscillation between a degraded L variety that dominates most aspects of society and a revered H variety that is seldom used is what Sayahi calls the “diglossia paradox” (2014, p. 3). He elaborates that, in this situation, speakers demean the code that they pass on across generations. This is true for all members of the speech community as “illiterate speakers, ...and ... educated speakers share a negative perception of the vernacular” (Sayahi, 2014, p. 3).

This paradox may entail a veneration of a variety that speakers find difficult to extemporize in. Sayahi notes that MSA is a marked linguistic choice in a communicative event. For it to not be so, there have to be pre-set conditions “determining the topic and the participants (e.g., a class discussion of a literary work or a radio interview on tourism industry in Tunisia)” (2014, p. 61). Sayahi’s conditions may no longer apply in the Tunisian contexts as TA is slowly, but surely, overtaking MSA in these situations. Consequently, Arabic speakers show a “limited degree of comfort...when they use MSA in an unplanned manner” (Sayahi, 2014, p. 61). Moreover, the lack of “predetermined events” where MSA would be unmarked, only “adds to the feeling of *artificiality* [emphasis added] when the occasion arises” (Sayahi, 2014, p. 61). In fact, Procházka (2021) points out that spoken Arabic is held in low prestige in most Arab states, especially academically.

The discomfort in speaking MSA rises from two factors: a) the language is nearly never used in speaking except for very formal contexts that most Tunisians do not go through daily. b) As a consequence of a), the domain of MSA has shrunk to the point where any use of MSA in speech *feels* misplaced. Hence, speaking a particular variety where it ought not be used would, evidently, be breaking the norm.

In more recent years, a noticeable linguistic change has been taking place in Tunisia. Sayahi (2014) observes that Tunisians are on their way to normalize their use of the dialect outside of its traditional domains. In fact, Tunisian Arabic is “gradually spreading to domains that would have been expected to be reserved exclusively for the H variety” (Sayahi, 2014, p. 69). These claims are corroborated by an observation of the increasing use of TA in media, in the religious domain, and in politics. Imams often cite from the Quran then proceed to explain what has been cited in TA. Similarly, politicians and government officials often use TA publicly with an occasional switch to MSA.

This is what Ralph W. Fasold termed “leaky diglossia” which “refers to cases in which one variety ‘leaks’ into the functions formerly reserved for the other” (1984, p. 41).

He explains that, “if there is substantial leakage of H or L varieties into the functions of the opposite variety, this is usually a sign of the incipient breakdown of the diglossic relationship” (1984, p. 52). In other words, leakage which ranges from a “drip to a torrent” is manifest when a variety expands beyond its linguistic domains and encroaches on those of the other variety (Fasold, 1984, p. 243). Accordingly, it is plausible to claim that the Tunisian linguistic scene is witnessing a case of leaky diglossia in which TA is slowly seeping into the domains of MSA.

### **3. Methodology**

This paper employed a quantitative research methodology using a self-reported online questionnaire to investigate participant's attitudes and language use patterns. The approach sought to collect information on Tunisian citizens' identity perceptions, domain-specific language use, fluency levels, and demographics. The ethical standards for research involving human subjects were followed in the conduct of this study. Before taking part, each participant gave their informed consent, aware that their answers would be kept private and anonymous.

#### **3.1. Participants**

The goals of this research relied on the self-report of participants on their perception of the official language and national dialect, as well as their domains of use of aforementioned codes. The original sample of respondents to the online questionnaire consisted of 69 individuals. Elementary to the validity of the data, respondents who held the Tunisian nationality but were not born to Tunisian parents were excluded. Likewise, respondents who have not received their education from the ages of 5-6 to the age of 18 in Tunisia were also excluded. The latter criterion was motivated by the assumption that all Tunisians receive a formal education in MSA during that timespan, while studying abroad may not always guarantee education in MSA. Applying these criteria excluded 4 respondents, making the total number of valid responses 65, between the ages of 19 and 40. The respondents consisted of 13 males (20%) and 52 females (80%). All of the respondents were native speakers of Tunisian Arabic and were Tunisian nationals as were their parents. Only 62 (92.3%) of the respondents have received/are receiving a higher education in Tunisia.

#### **3.2. Methods**

The materials for this study were an online questionnaire written in standard Arabic. The 35-item questionnaire consisted of eight sections. The first one collected the demographic data of the participants, specifically their age, gender, their and their parents' nationality, level of education, and their academic field of specialty. The second section asked respondents to report their level of fluency in Tunisian Arabic, Modern Standard Arabic, French, English and another language on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree). The third section asked respondents to report the domains of using Modern Standard Arabic. The domains were labeled: *none, home, work, school, street, place of worship*. It also asked respondents to report on the interlocutors with whom they use MSA. The interlocutors were labeled as: *no one, parents,*



siblings, children, spouse, peers, superiors, students/employees. The categorisation of interlocutors in this manner aimed at measuring the use of the variety in relation to social distance/proximity. The fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh section covered the same points with regard to Tunisian Arabic, French, English, and another language respectively. The eighth section asked respondents to report on their perception of the relationship between Tunisian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic. The options were itemised as (1= *one language*, 2= *a language (MSA) and a dialect (TA)*, 3= *two separate yet connected languages*). Additionally, respondents were asked to report on a 5-point Likert scale (1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3= neutral, 4= agree, 5= strongly agree) whether they believed Tunisian Arabic or Modern Standard Arabic ought to be the only/official language used. Respondents were equally asked to report on their preferred language of use (*Modern Standard Arabic, Tunisian Arabic, French, English, another language*). Finally, the questionnaire requested respondents to label themselves in terms of identity. The options included: *Tunisian, Arab, Tunisian and Arab, Arab and Tunisian*, and *other*.

### **3.3. Data Analysis**

Descriptive statistics were used in the analysis of the online questionnaire data to compile demographic data, language proficiency levels, and usage trends. To investigate possible connections between language use patterns, demographic factors, and language perceptions, correlation tests were performed using SPSS software. Trends in language choice and identity labeling were found using frequency distributions.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

### **4.1. Results**

The above-mentioned questionnaire yielded significant results which will be elaborated in the present section. In relation to self-reported levels of fluency, the average score for Tunisian Arabic was 4.84 while the score for Modern Standard Arabic was 4.16. The score for French fluency was relatively low in comparison, averaging 2.95. In contrast, the average fluency score for English was 4.24 which is higher than that of Modern Standard Arabic.

With regard to the domains of language use, 43.1% of respondents answered that they do not use MSA altogether, while only 38.5% of respondents said that they use it in formal domains. Meanwhile 10.8% of respondents reported using Modern Standard Arabic in both formal and informal domains. In sharp contrast, 72.3% of respondents reported using Tunisian Arabic in both formal and informal domains, including places of worship. Moreover, respondents have reported using French and English more than Modern Standard Arabic in formal domains (40% and 44.6% respectively). Similarly, both French (24.6%) and English (47.7%) were reported to be used more often in both formal and informal domains. A summary of these results is presented in table 1.

**Table 1**

*Domains of language use*

	Formal	Informal	Both	Not used
MSA	38.5%	7.7%	10.8%	43.1%
TA	3.1%	21.5%	72.3%	3.1%
French	40%	6.2%	24.6%	29.2%
English	44.6%	4.6%	47.7%	3.1%

As shown in table 2, the respondents have also provided a report of the interlocutors with whom each language was used. The results reiterated the findings in relation to domain of use. In fact, Tunisian Arabic was the language that was used with all the interlocutors, regardless of social proximity/distance. French followed TA when addressing superiors (24.6%), followed closely by English (23.1%). As for addressing peers, English followed TA with 56.9%, followed by French (30.8%). Modern Standard Arabic was the language least used with 58.5% of respondents reporting not using the language with anyone.

**Table 2**

*Interlocutors with whom participants use the different languages*

	No one	Parents	Siblings	Children	Spouse	Peers	Superiors	Students/ Employees
MSA	58.5%	7.7%	7.7%	21.5%	1.5%	7.7%	9.2%	29.2%
TA	6.2%	93.8%	90.8%	83.1%	26.2%	83.1%	46.2%	72.3%
French	32.2%	16.9%	16.9%	10.8%	6.2%	30.8%	24.6%	46.2%
English	6.2%	16.9%	44.6%	12.3%	3.1%	56.9%	23.1%	73.8%

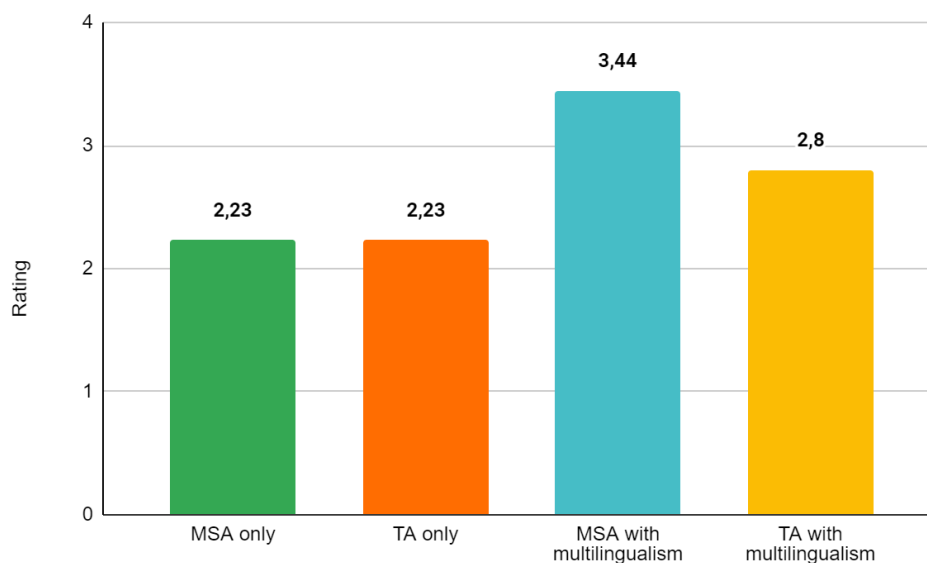
With regards to the respondents' perception of the relationship binding Tunisian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic, no one deemed the two codes to be one language. However, the opinions of respondents were closely split with 58.5% considering Modern Standard Arabic to be a language while Tunisian Arabic is the local dialect. On the other hand, a significant number of respondents (41.5%) considered the two codes to be two separate languages.

Additionally, the questionnaire included a gauge of respondents' preferred linguistic situation in Tunisia. The lowest scores were assigned to cases of monolingualism, where Modern Standard Arabic was the sole language of communication in both formal and informal domains ( $m= 2.23$ ). This result was the same for a Tunisian Arabic case of monolingualism ( $m= 2.23$ ). The respondents showed a preference for multilingualism where Modern Standard Arabic is the official language ( $m= 3.44$ ), followed by a preferred case of multilingualism where Tunisian Arabic would be the official language ( $m= 2.8$ ). These scores are illustrated in figure 1.



**Figure 1**

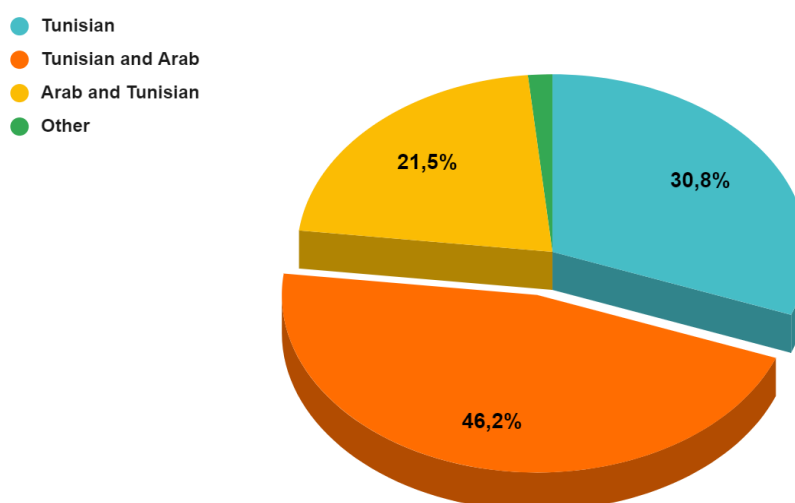
*Rating of the preferred official language in Tunisia*



These findings were paradoxical to the respondents' preferred language of communication. In fact, 49.2% chose Tunisian Arabic as their preferred means of communication. The second rank was occupied by English as 53.8% of respondents selected it as the second preferred means of communication. The paradox deepened when respondents were asked to identify themselves. 46.2% identified themselves as Tunisian *and* Arab, while 30.8% identified themselves as Tunisian only. It is important to mention that none of the respondents selected the "Arab only" category. These findings are illustrated in figure 2.

**Figure 2**

*Descriptive graphic of respondents' self-reported identification*



A Pearson correlation test was conducted to gauge any relationship between the respondents' perception of the relationship between Tunisian Arabic and Modern Standard Arabic and their pattern of identification. The test yielded a significant negative correlation at the 0.05 level ( $r = -0.26$ ) revealing that respondents who identified as Tunisian only were more likely to consider Modern Standard Arabic and Tunisian Arabic to be two separate languages.

**Table 3**

*Correlation between respondents' self-reported identity and their perception of the relationship between MSA and TA*

Correlations		Respondent Identity	Perception of MSA and TA
Respondent Identity	Pearson Correlation	1	-,267*
	Sig. (1-tailed)		,016
	N	65	65
Perception of MSA and TA	Pearson Correlation	-,267*	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	,016	
	N	65	65

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (1-tailed).

#### 4.2. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that the diglossic situation described by Ferguson in 1959 has changed to a significant degree. In fact, the dichotomy dividing the use of the H variety in formal domains while the L variety was exclusive to informal domains seems to no longer stand. Indeed, respondents have reported a greater use of Tunisian Arabic in both formal and informal domains while Modern Standard Arabic remains predominantly unused regardless of domains and interlocutors. These findings provide a direct answer to the first research question, proving that the domain of MSA has indeed shrunk over the years since Ferguson's paper.

Moreover, the findings go against the post-independence drive towards Arabicization that sought to eradicate the linguistic colonization of the French language. The efforts deployed by the post-independence government, spearheaded by Bourguiba, were to guard the Tunisian identity rather than efface it in exchange for an Arab one (Bassiouny, 2020). Indeed, Bourguiba has often championed "the Tunisian personality" in his public speeches, a unique defining characteristic of the inhabitants of Tunisia. Versteegh (1997) remarks that the Arab conquest of North Africa, between the seventh and eleventh centuries A.D., was likely met with a multilingual community where natives spoke more than one language. Indeed, archeological evidence testifies to the persistence of a Latin in the south of modern-day Tunisia during the time of the Islamic conquests (Versteegh, 1997). It is arguable then, per the second research question, that infrequent use of MSA is a token of a stronger sense of a Tunisian identity rather than an Arab one. This identity, as is historically shown, is rooted in multilingualism.

The findings further confirm the theorizing of Fasold regarding leaky diglossia, as well as the concept advanced by Sayahi, i.e. diglossia paradox. As the domains of Modern Standard Arabic shrink, the domains of Tunisian Arabic expand significantly and are followed by two foreign languages (French and English). The Tunisian curriculum introduces Tunisian students to foreign languages at a young age (between 7 and 8). These two foreign languages are an obligatory part of the students' academic foundation. Moreover, Tunisian high school students have the possibility of learning a third optional foreign language to their inventory. It is not strange for the dedicated Tunisian student to graduate with notable competence in both French, English, as well as an additional language. This is manifest in the respondents' preference for multilingualism in general, a part and parcel of the Tunisian identity itself.

Paradoxically, while the respondents have argued in favor of Modern Standard Arabic as the official language of the country, they have revealed reduced fluency in it, lack of use, as well as lack of preference in use. This is the core of Sayahi's argument (2014) in which he describes how the speakers of the L variety often denigrate their mother tongue (Tunisian Arabic) in favor of a universally accepted standard. One of the remarks made by Sayahi is the prevalence of this paradoxical attitude regardless of the level of education of people. This has been proven by the present study as no significant correlation has been found between the level of education of respondents and their preference for Modern Standard Arabic as the official language.

Nevertheless, these findings correlate with a stronger sense of a Tunisian, or a Tunisian *first*, identity where Arabic and Arabness come at a second level. The post-Arab(ic) Tunisian reality, a product of disillusionment with pan-Arab ideology, championed a more localized sense of identity. To answer the third research question raised by this paper, Tunisian identity itself, though grounded in a muslim and Arabic-speaking center, remains a plural and historical vessel testifying to the geographical history of multiplicity and diversity. One of the relics of this multiplicity is the Tunisian Arabic's rich vocabulary, laden with "foreign" elements, and the Tunisian's affinity for multilingualism.

## **5. Conclusion**

### **5.1. Limitations**

The findings reported herein should be considered in the light of some limitations which are limited resources, a small sample size, and individual differences. To begin with, the results of the reported experiment have the potential for refinement provided that analysis be conducted using appropriate software. Second, the study reported on findings from a sample of 65 individuals. The sample size remains relatively small in comparison to the general population of Tunisians. Lastly, individual differences must be considered in the interpretation of the results. In fact, Tunisians differ in their attitudes towards TA and MSA. Their perception of the dialect and of the standard may vary in accordance with several factors such as upbringing, field of study, age, etc. Further exploration in this area could use multivariate analysis to shed light on variables that may affect participants' language attitudes and ideologies.

## 5.2. Significance and Future Research

In conclusion, the linguistic situation of Tunisia, though still diglossic with a H (High) and L (Low) varieties, is not identical to the one described by either Ferguson (1959) nor Walters (2003). The present research has shown that the domain of Modern Standard Arabic has shrunk to a significant degree, while the domains of Tunisian Arabic have expanded. Nevertheless, respondents have shown a keen attachment to the standard as the official language, albeit with multilingualism, which testifies to a persistent diglossia paradox. Moreover, these findings have revealed the dynamic nature of diglossia, unlike Ferguson's qualification of it as a relatively stable situation. More importantly, the historical identity of Tunisia as a multilingual and multiethnic hub may testify to the Tunisian preference for maintaining such a sense of plurality that is not a fragmentation of the identity but rather a mosaic rendition of it.

Future research is encouraged to expand the participant pool and incorporate qualitative methods to gain deeper insights into language attitudes and usage patterns. Additionally, the implications of this study for language policy highlight the need to consider both the practical use and emotional significance of language in multilingual contexts. More specifically, a reform in teaching Arabic in diglossic communities is needed.

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